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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ATHENS 000627

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TAGS: PREL PGOV NATO MK GR

SUBJECT: GREECE/MACEDONIA - FOSTERING PROGRESS FROM ATHENS

REF: A. ATHENS 596

¶B. ATHENS 92

Classified By: Ambassador Daniel V. Speckhard for 1.4 (b) and (d)

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SUMMARY  
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¶1. (C) Foreign Minister Bakoyannis and Prime Minister Karamanlis continue the public line that Greece supports Macedonian integration into Euro-Atlantic structures, but only after the name issue is resolved. They continue to profess that the next move must be Macedonia's to agree to a name acceptable to Greece with a broad scope of use (they do not view Macedonia's acceptance of the latest Nimetz proposal on the eve of the Bucharest Summit as a significant expression of flexibility). The Greeks also continue to maintain that an acceptable solution must be comprehensive - "erga omnes" - and make clear that the "Republic of Macedonia" comprises only part of a larger/historic Macedonia. Karamanlis and Bakoyannis have termed Skopje "intransigent," and various Greek officials appear to be backgrounding the Greek press that Greece sees little reason for further negotiations under Nimetz' auspices until Skopje "shows readiness to compromise." The Greeks also term Macedonian PM Gruevski's call for a public referendum on any solution as evidence of Macedonia's lack of desire to reach an agreement. Finally, we are hearing from all our Greek contacts that they see no possibility of further compromise from Skopje until after the June Parliamentary elections and the formation of a new government in Macedonia.

¶2. (C) Although we continue to press at all levels for active engagement, flexibility, and creativity, we believe it unlikely that the Greeks will be more energized until after the Macedonian elections. We also assess that the Greeks may be laying out a public maximalist line and that further compromise from Athens may be possible should the Greeks perceive concomitant movement from the Macedonians. In particular, the Greeks may be led to revise their position on an "erga omnes" solution in favor of Nimetz' most recent formulation of a "domestic name," and an "international name." Furthermore, the Greeks may also be persuaded to deal with the sensitive issues of Macedonian identity and language tacitly rather than explicitly in any document, if the Macedonians could agree to the same. The Greeks, however, will wait for what they deem as "credible" indications from Skopje that it is prepared after the elections to move beyond Nimetz' most recent proposal and accept some sort of name in which the term "Macedonia" is modified by a descriptive adjective before showing any additional flexibility. We should continue to urge the Greeks to come up with several names they can live with, and which the Macedonians have not rejected, and provide those to Nimetz, rather than only reacting to Nimetz' ideas. As we seek levers that will sway the Greeks on this issue, we continue to make clear to them our determination to reach a compromise soon so that

Macedonia can join NATO on the same timetable as Croatia and Albania. End Summary.

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The Greek Line

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Although recent public debate has been maintained, and hint that the next step is Macedonia's, and not Greece's, to take. MFA Balkans Director Angelopoulos told us that Greece will "gladly respond" to any indication from Skopje that it is ready to consider names beyond the most recent Nimetz proposal "Republic of Macedonia (Skopje)," which Greece has rejected. It seems clear, however, that in spite of our constant badgering, the Greeks are in no mood to offer further compromises at this time, and they are awaiting signals from Skopje.

¶4. (C) Post-Bucharest, Karamanlis and Bakoyannis have both made statements that any solution must be comprehensive - "erga omnes" ) and that the name that make clear that "Macedonia" comprises only part of a larger/historic Macedonia. And, the Greeks are not limiting their comments to the Greek media; FM Bakoyannis made these points in an April 29 Op-Ed in the Washington Times.

¶5. (C) The Greeks appear skeptical that they will receive

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the signals they profess to seek from Skopje, at least in the short term. The Greek press is widely reporting various "unnamed government sources" opining that there is little reason to engage further with Skopje under Nimetz' auspices until Skopje shows it is "ready to compromise." Furthermore, in spite of our constant pressuring, virtually all of our Greek contacts at all levels have told us that they assess that Skopje will make no positive signals to Greece in the run-up to the June Parliamentary elections. The Greeks appear to expect little from Macedonia until after a new government is formed in there. Our contacts point to PM Gruevski's widely reported remarks about the need for a public referendum on any name solution as an indication of how dealing with this issue in Macedonia's heated political climate could torpedo any prospects for further progress.

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Fostering Progress  
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¶6. (C) Although we press all of our contacts at all levels for active engagement, creativity, and flexibility, we assess that the Greeks are unlikely to move off of their public positions until after they know who their Macedonian negotiating partners will be, and they see some indications that those partners will be prepared to entertain changes to the Nimetz March proposal. The Greeks will respond to invitations from Nimetz for discussions, but they are unlikely to take any steps to narrow further the differences between the sides until this has occurred.

¶7. (C) Few levers are likely to influence Greek behavior on this point. Although the Greeks value their bilateral relationship with us, there is nothing on the U.S./Greece bilateral agenda that assumes the political and public importance in Greece of the name issue. Linkages between Greek behavior on Macedonia with Greek desiderata on unrelated issues is likely to remain counterproductive. Explicit linkage of the name issue with Greece's desire to participate in the visa waiver program (VWP) is likely to have the reverse effect and make it more difficult for the political leadership in the face of what the press will label "blackmail" to sell out their cultural heritage. Likewise, we need to avoid actions that could initiate a "tit-for-tat" response that could jeopardize other strategic interests with Greece, such as our ongoing unrestricted use of the deep water port and air field at Souda Bay -- our key military logistics hub in the Eastern Mediterranean -- and the Port of Thessaloniki as a key route for transit of goods to Kosovo

and the Balkans.

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Greek Flexibility ) Not Necessarily An Oxymoron  
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¶8. (C) We do assess, however, that the Greeks are laying out a maximalist position that could be subject to further revision under the right conditions. Should the Greeks deem that the Macedonians are prepared to move beyond the most recent Nimetz proposal towards a name that is more acceptable to Greece, we could envision a concomitant change in the Greek position in the following areas for example:

-- Scope of Application: Although the Greeks insist on "erga omnes," we assess that they may be led to revise this position in favor of Nimetz' most recent suggestion of a "domestic name" and an "international name" as laid out in the March proposal. We can also expect the Greeks to continue to seek assurances that the "international name" will be used for bilateral relations, including by the U.S. (in spite of our having given no hope on the latter).

-- Macedonian Identity and Language: We assess that there may also be greater flexibility on how best to handle the sensitive issue of Macedonian identity and language (e.g. what understandings exist for use of the adjective "Macedonian"). Greek negotiators have emphasized to us that an explicit affirmation of a Macedonian people and Macedonian language in the document (as PM Gruevski seems to insist on) would impose an insurmountable barrier for ratification of the agreement in the Greek Parliament. They acknowledge that, if the agreement is silent on "the adjective," the Macedonians will likely get what they need from everyone in the world (except Greece) through everyday usage. To make it into a public issue, however, will make negotiations far more complex than they already are.

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Ready for A Deal ) But On Their Terms  
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¶9. (C) In short, the Greeks want to get this behind them, but are unwilling to make many concessions in their positions to do so. They see Macedonia as the demander; they accordingly expect Skopje to make further concessions to achieve a deal. The difficulty of negotiation is overlaid with the ubiquitous condescension with which Greeks speak to and about Macedonians. GOG spokesmen swear to us that they are doing their best to speak with respect for the "Skopjeans," but their success is limited, and the Greek press makes no such effort.

¶10. (C) Limited additional Greek flexibility is possible, but in spite of our best efforts to push Greece to show initiative in the negotiations, the Greeks are likely to continue to wait until after the Macedonian elections and a move by Skopje to show further flexibility on the name in line with the geographic or other adjective that is in front of "Macedonia" and gives connotation that it is only a part of the broader Macedonia. Our stance, hardball or softball, is unlikely to affect their political calculations in the near term. In spite of this, the Embassy will continue to use every opportunity to press them to recognize their responsibility and interest to follow up on their commitment to work expeditiously to find a solution to this longstanding problem.

SPECKHARD